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SUBJECT: LESOTHO'S KING WANTS U.S. DOMESTIC ISSUES RESOLVED SO OBAMA  
CAN FOCUS ON AFRICA

¶1. At the monarch's invitation, on February 9, 2010, Ambassador Nolan and DCM Power met with King Letsie III and spoke with him for almost an hour on the current status of the health care reform proposals in the United States. King Letsie was particularly interested in the cultural context in which the current debate is taking place, noting that universal coverage does not seem to be an issue that merits as much acrimonious debate as it has received in the U.S. political sphere. The Ambassador gave a brief overview of the status of the reform efforts and outlined the various interests and issues involved in the proposals. King Letsie was appreciative of the briefing and noted that his interest was driven in part by a desire for President Obama to resolve his domestic issues of health care and job creation, so that "he could return his attention to African issues."

¶2. Comment: The Basotho monarch is the head of state and largely a ceremonial figure, deeply revered by the Basotho people while remaining wholly outside of the local political sphere. He was genuinely interested in the subject of U.S. health care reform; with the few foreign policy discussion options available to him in this small country's community, this meeting may have been in part a means of engaging in a substantive conversation that would not have any effect on contentious Basotho politics. King Letsie was alone and was relaxed and at ease, dressed in jeans and a casual shirt, having just returned from his farm. This was the first event of this kind in recent years, and the king mentioned that he would like to hold similar discussions in the future. He clearly follows U.S. politics closely, perhaps in part because his wife, Queen Masenate, is currently in the U.S. pursuing a degree in economics at Columbia University.

NOLAN